lines. Even when, as was usually the case, the relatives of the Emperor formed a privileged group, the whirligig of fate displaced them with another governing line. The rebellions and civil strife so characteristic of Chinese history provided an additional avenue by which men of force could come to the front, regardless of birth and even of education.

The system did not entirely eliminate the divisions wrought by heredity. Many families possessed traditions of education, good breeding, inherited wealth, and devotion to public service from which their scions derived a decided advantage in the competition in the examination stalls and in obtaining office. Members of these houses naturally were inclined to intermarry. Under the Later Han, it will be recalled, certain powerful families rooted-in the Confucian tradition and interlocked by marriage for a time formed a kind of ruling class. A somewhat similar aristocracy arose in the period of division between the Han and the T'ang.

Apparently through the centuries almost every community has had its "first families" who have been looked up to and accorded leadership in local affairs. This has fluctuated, as in all countries, and it is an exceptional district or town which has not known in-stances of the rise and fall of a great house. Indeed, it has been so usual as to become proverbial. On the other hand, a few pa-ternal lines have been accorded recognition over the course of the centuries. Such has been that of Confucius. Moreover, the Han and succeeding dynasties by no means entirely abolished all hereditary rank. For example, the Ch'ing, although it made a fairly clean sweep of claims to titles existing at its accession, had its own nobles. A large proportion of these were Manchus, but

some were Chinese. However, apparently as a safeguard against sedition through an hereditary caste, only some of the titles were granted in perpetuity, and most of these were held by Manchus. While as a rule high offices in the Empire carried with them a title or titles, and in some instances the recipient's forefathers were made to share in the award by the posthumous grant of rank for several generations back, the honors usually did not descend to the sons. The heirs either were commoners or were given titles of progressively lower degree for each succeeding generation until the family found itself once more among the undistinguished.